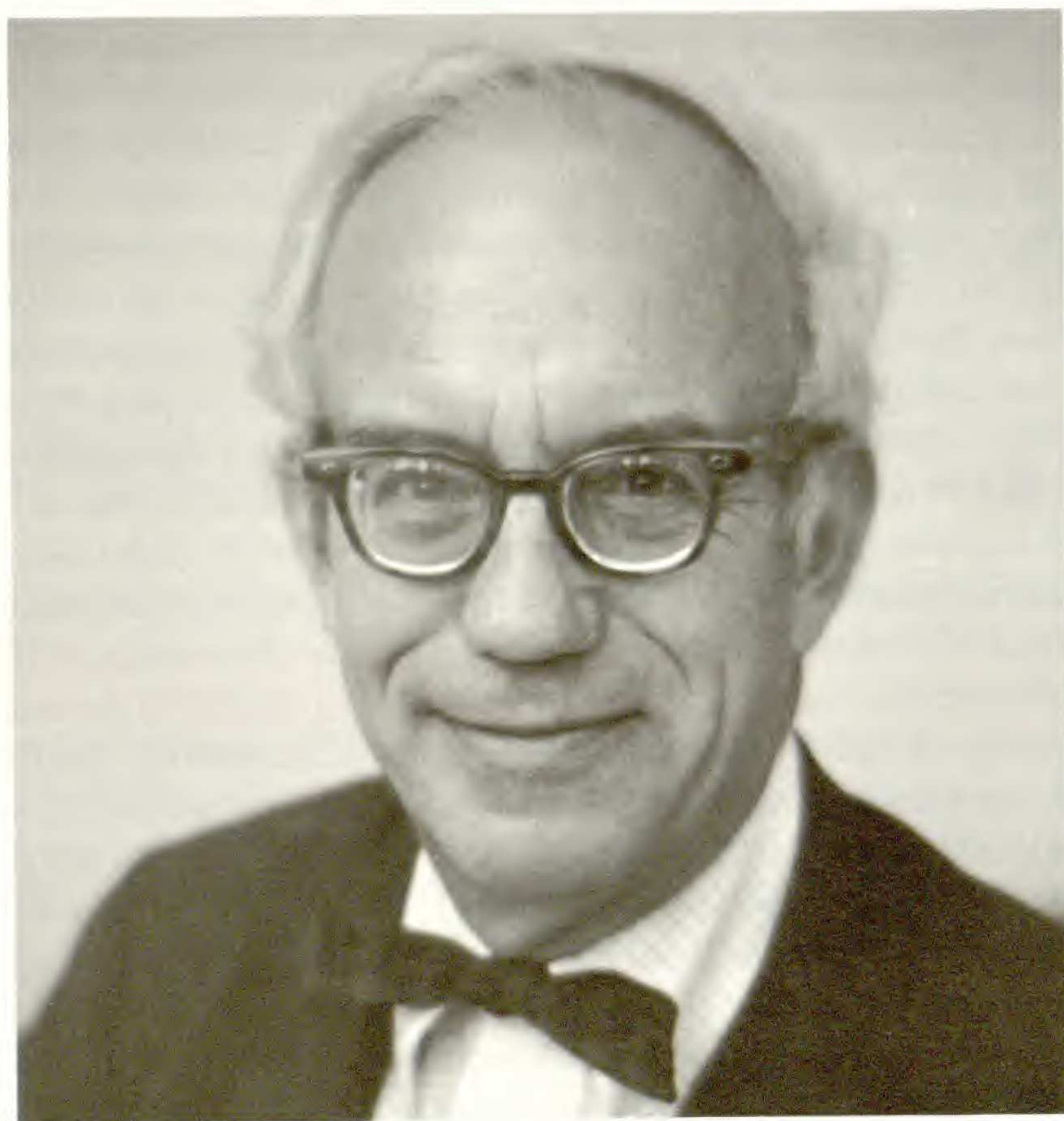


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Obituary: Rolla Milton Tryon, Jr. (1916-2001)



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Rolla Tryon, a member of the American Fern Society since 1932 and one of the twentieth century's most eminent students of pteridophytes, was born on August 26, 1916 in Chicago, Illinois. His father, a professor of American history and education at the University of Chicago, maintained a summer cottage in Chesterton, Indiana in addition to his home in Chicago. Rolla's fascination with ferns and fern allies developed during boyhood forays from that Ches-

The photograph was taken by Dr. Walter H. Hodge in Mexico City in December, 1972 and was made available by the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation.

terton cottage into sand dune habitats along Lake Michigan in the northwest of Indiana. At the age of 18, he published his first paper, relating his observations on *Osmunda* plants in the Indiana Dunes (see complete bibliography below). As a boy, Rolla was greatly influenced by, and in turn influenced, Charles Deam (author of the 1940 *Flora of Indiana*), advising Deam about fern species he had found in the dunes area. When a doubting Deam appeared at the cottage door one day asking to meet Rolla and to be shown these ferns *in situ*, he was surprised to learn that Rolla was not the adult of the family but a mere boy of 14. Thus began a productive friendship documented in Rolla's correspondence with Deam from May, 1935 to January, 1953. All the penny postcards and letters he received from Deam have been carefully maintained in one of Rolla's files, now archived at Indiana University—fascinating reading. Rolla's insatiable boyhood appetite for ferns got him into a bit of trouble at home, however, when his father learned that he had charged Bower's three volumes on *The Ferns* to his account at Brentano's bookstore in Chicago.

Rolla built a solid academic superstructure on the foundation of these boyhood experiences. Among his academic accomplishments were an A.A. degree in 1935 and a B.S. degree in 1937, both from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.M. in 1938 from the University of Wisconsin. In 1940 he earned an M.S. and in 1941 a Ph.D., both from Harvard University. During his days as a Harvard student, he contracted malaria in South Carolina while collecting plants for M. L. Fernald, and during the war-torn year following completion of his Ph.D. he served as a lab technician in the U. S. Chemical Warfare Service at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His father thought he should follow his Ph.D. in botany with another, this time in chemistry, so that he could earn a living, but instead Rolla became an Instructor in Botany first at Dartmouth College, then at the University of Wisconsin before becoming an Assistant Professor in Botany at the University of Minnesota in 1945. While an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Rolla met Alice Faber. Their marriage in 1945 initiated not only a happy and enduring domestic partnership but also a research synergism whose productivity has nourished pteridologists throughout the world.

In 1947 Rolla became Associate Professor in Botany at Washington University, St. Louis and Assistant Curator of the herbarium of the Missouri Botanical Garden, positions he held to 1957. During this appointment, he and Alice were the original organizers of the Missouri Botanical Garden's annual Systematics Symposium, whose 48th meeting was held 12–13 October, 2001. This highly successful annual meeting has received continuous support from the National Science Foundation from its second year (1954) to the present (with the lapse of a single year). From 1946 to 1957 Rolla served as curator and librarian of the American Fern Society's library and herbarium, responding to members' requests for loans of materials. That herbarium and library was subsequently entrusted to Warren H. Wagner at the University of Michigan. Following a year as Research Associate at the University of California, Berkeley, Rolla went to the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University as Associate Curator and Curator of Ferns in 1958 and became Curator of the Gray Herbarium in 1967. Rolla

and Alice traveled the world extensively, attending international meetings, conducting field work, studying specimens at major herbaria in the Americas, Europe, and Africa, and conducting field courses on the ferns. In addition to other services to professional societies, Rolla served for many years as Associate Editor of *Rhodora* and the *American Fern Journal*, as Associate Editor of *Brittonia* (1961–1964), as Editor-in-Chief of *Rhodora* (1977–1982), and as President of the New England Botanical Club and the American Fern Society.

A framed photograph of his revered mentor, Charles A. Weatherby (see *American Fern Journal* 40[1] for a remarkable series of papers honoring this unusually respected and beloved botanist), was always prominently displayed on Rolla's desk at Harvard, undoubtedly inspiring his own welcoming, patient, and supportive response to all who entered his office seeking counsel. In 1970 Rolla initiated an annual New England Fern Conference at Harvard Forest. For 20 years this provided a stimulating intellectual setting in which students of fern biology discussed and developed their ideas. In 1972 he became Professor of Biology at Harvard University, holding both the Curatorship and Professorship until his retirement in 1987. He remained at Harvard as Professor Emeritus from 1987 to 1989 when he moved to the University of South Florida in Tampa as Adjunct Professor, bringing with him his extensive library of fern and biogeographic literature. To mark the retirements of Alice and Rolla Tryon from Harvard, a festschrift of 13 papers plus introduction was published in their honor in the *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* (vol. 77: 225–339, 1990).

At the University of South Florida, Rolla and Alice helped found the Institute for Systematic Botany and endowed the Tryon Lecture Series that brings several internationally known botanists to the university each year. In their research-active office on the Tampa campus, he and Alice continued their pteridological work, as his following bibliography indicates.

Rolla Tryon's publication list exceeds 100 titles and includes a great breadth of topics. Papers ranged from articles on pteridophytes for the 1943 *Encyclopedia Britannica* to a glossary of terms relating to the fern leaf, discussions of the history of pteridology and fern classification, a remembrance of his graduate mentor and counselor Charles A. Weatherby, discussions of the formalities of fern nomenclature, and many book reviews. His monographs and revisions focused mostly on ferns but also included angiosperms *Convolvulus* and *Elymus*. Signal among these were his revisions of *Pteridium*, *Doryopteris*, the *Selaginella rupestris* group, American *Notholaena*, and the Cyatheaceae. His papers on fern biogeography began with *Doryopteris* in 1944, matured in his exposition of geographic speciation in *Selaginella* in 1971, and continued to his and Alice's 1999 discussion of the phytogeography of eastern North American ferns (honoring Ching Ren-Chang). Floristic and taxonomic notes on ferns ranged from simple observations of growth forms and hybrids to elucidations of complex taxonomic and nomenclatural issues. For his 1955 publication on the taxonomy of cycads (coauthored with students in his Washington University class) he was awarded the 1956 Robert Montgomery award of the Fairchild Tropical Garden for distinguished achievement in the world of palms

and cycads. At the time of his death, he had a book review in press in *Rhodora* and a paper in press in *Bradea* (coauthored with his former student Paulo Windisch).

In addition to his numerous papers on ferns and other topics, Rolla is notable for his books. Among these are two editions of his *Ferns and Fern Allies of Wisconsin* (1940, 1953) and *Ferns and Fern Allies of Minnesota* (1954, 1980). He is renowned for his knowledge of the ferns of Peru, first expressed in his 1964 *Ferns of Peru* (250 pages in the *Contributions from the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University*). This treatment was updated and completed in six subsequent parts entitled *Pteridophyta of Peru* between 1989 and 1994, mostly coauthored with Robert Stolze but with several portions contributed by other pteridological specialists. His monumental 1982 book *Ferns and Allied Plants with Special Reference to Tropical America*, coauthored with Alice Tryon, is an encyclopedic treatment of this subject that continues to stimulate new research, as does his treatment of Pteridaceae, with Alice Tryon and Karl Kramer, in volume 1 of *Families and Genera of Vascular Plants* edited by K. Kramer and P. S. Green.

Rolla's kindly and perceptive mentoring and his outstanding contributions to our knowledge of ferns is signaled by having the following four fern taxa named in his honor.

- 1) *Asplenium tryonii* Correll. In describing this species, Donovan Correll (1961) said "It is a pleasure to name this species for Dr. Tryon, who has always been most gracious in helping his fellow-workers with their never-ending problems in the study of ferns." Known only from Chihuahua, Mexico, this species was further discussed and illustrated in *Ferns and Fern Allies of Chihuahua* by Knobloch and Correll (1962).
- 2) *Alsophila tryonorum* Riba. The eminent Mexican pteridologist Ramón Riba (see American Fern Journal 90:112–118, 2000) stated that "this species is named after Dr. Rolla M. Tryon and Dr. Alice F. Tryon for their contributions to the taxonomy of the ferns" (Riba, 1967). The plural specific epithet recognizes the close professional relationship between this highly productive research team. This tree fern species is now known as *Trichipteris tryonorum* (Riba) R. Tryon following its transfer by Rolla in his 1970 paper on the classification of the Cyatheaceae.
- 3) *Nephelea tryoniana* Gastony. "I am pleased to name this species for my mentor, Dr. Rolla M. Tryon, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the understanding of the systematics and evolution of the family Cyatheaceae" (Gastony, 1973). Subsequent research by Conant (Conant and Cooper-Driver, 1980; Conant, 1983) revealed that this tree fern species is a reproductively stabilized diploid hybrid species that is now regarded as *Alsophila tryoniana* (Gastony) Conant.
- 4) *Tryonella* Pichi Sermolli. This new generic name was established by Pichi Sermolli (1974) "in honour of the eminent pteridologist R. M. Tryon, Jr., author of many important papers on ferns, who, *inter alia*, supported the distinction of the present genus from *Doryopteris*, though without giving it

a new name." This name is currently regarded as a synonym of *Doryopteris* by Tryon and Tryon (1982) and Tryon, Tryon, and Kramer (1990).

Among the doctoral graduate students he trained, Rolla counted the following (those with asterisks received their degrees from other institutions): Alice F. Tryon, *Karl Kramer, *Ramon Riba, Gerald Gastony, Lawrence Palkovic, David Barrington, David Conant, Paulo Windisch, *R. James Hickey, *Robbin Moran, Sonia Sultan, and Calvin Sperling. He also mentored Robert Stolze in his taxonomic revision of *Cnemidaria* at the Field Museum. Always available to his students, he modeled his supportive and insightful mentoring on his experiences with his own graduate mentor, Charles Weatherby. For this he has earned our love as well as our respect. His impact on his students, and their students, and their students is incalculable.

In 1978 Rolla M. Tryon, Jr. was elected to honorary membership in the American Fern Society, a special category of membership for persons who have made outstanding contributions to the study of ferns. In 1984 he received a Merit Award from the Botanical Society of America "In recognition of distinguished achievement in and contributions to the advancement of botanical science. Pre-eminently knowledgeable in matters of taxonomy and nomenclature, this foremost pteridologist is a perceptive student of phytogeography and of the evolutionary impact of the selective process during plant migration."

In addition to Rolla's botanical activities he was also highly skilled in running a family farm in Knox County, Indiana for many years. He visited the farm, overseeing its management, a few times each year. The extensive records he kept in managing crops and livestock illustrate his practical ability in managing business as well as scientific data.

On August 20, 2001, six days before his eighty-fifth birthday, Rolla Milton Tryon, Jr., left us to continue our work with the pteridophytes of the world, and to delight in them, without him. We do this fortified by his writings, the echoes of his encouraging words, and his everlasting example. He was the beloved husband of Alice Faber Tryon, the benefactor of countless students of pteridophytes, including many who never knew him personally, an inspiration and counselor to many collaborators and coauthors, the advisor of doctoral students, the teacher of innumerable undergraduates, and our dear friend and mentor. He will be deeply missed. He already is.

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